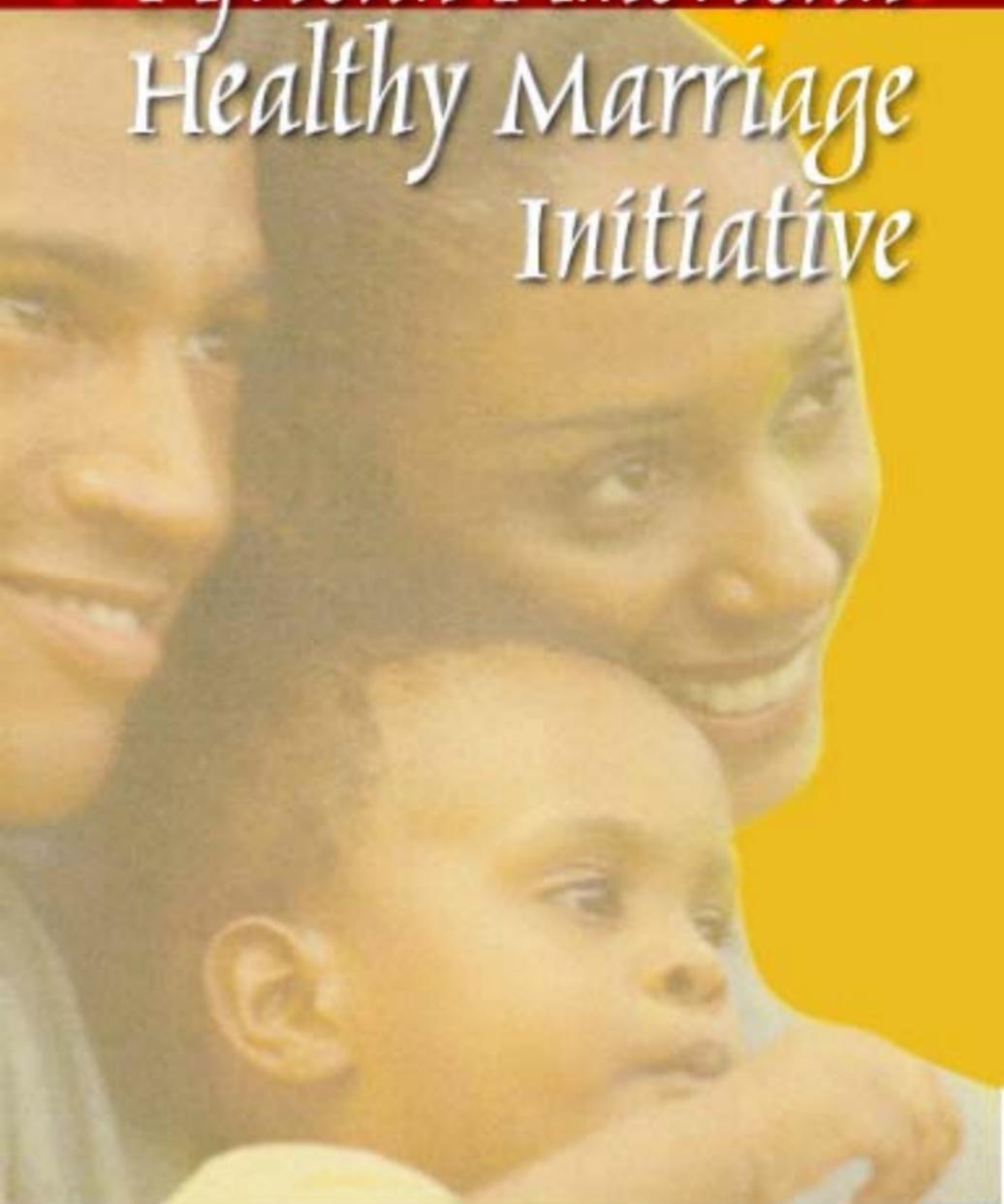


*African American  
Healthy Marriage  
Initiative*



**I**n August, 2003 the Center for New Black Leadership (CNBL), Alpha Phi Alpha National Fraternity Inc. (APA), and the National Executive Directors Association of the Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America, Inc. (OICA) in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF) convened a historical roundtable discussion on the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative.

This historic conversation was based on research which demonstrates the strong correlation between family structure and child well-being. All things being equal, the child on our cover growing up in a healthy, married two-parent family will do better on a host of outcomes than his peers who do not. Further, many social problems affecting children, families and communities could be prevented if more children grew up in healthy married families. The African American Healthy Marriage Initiative desires to have more children realizing the benefits of growing up in a healthy, married two-parent family.

During this important roundtable, members developed the mission of the AAHMI. This mission statement serves as the beacon which lights the way for the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative.

### *AAHMI Mission*

*The mission of the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative (AAHMI) is to promote and strengthen the institution of healthy marriage in the African American community.*

## What is a Healthy Marriage?

The Initiative's concept of healthy marriage is guided by Lewis and Gossett (1999), who define eight essential characteristics of a healthy marriage:

- Both partners participate in the definition of the relationship
- There is a strong marital bond characterized by levels of both closeness and autonomy
- The spouses are interested in each other's thoughts and feelings
- The expression of feelings is encouraged
- The inevitable conflicts that do occur do not escalate or lead to despair
- Problem-solving skills are well developed
- Most basic values are shared
- The ability to deal with change and stress is well developed

## Why does Healthy Marriage matter?

Research suggests that child well-being is related to family structure. All things being equal, children who grow up in healthy married, two-parent families do better on a host of outcomes than those who do not.

## Did You Know...

According to the 2000 census figures and KidsCount:

### AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN

33.3% live in married couple families

46.2% live in single parent families

12% do not live with a parent

33.1% live in poverty

### NON-HISPANIC WHITE CHILDREN

75.2% live in married couple families

17.7% live in single parent families

3.7% do not live with a parent

9.3% living in married couple families live in poverty

Children in two-parent households are:

- Less than half as likely to have emotional or behavioral problems
- 33% less likely to use illegal drugs, alcohol or tobacco
- 44% less likely to be physically abused or neglected
- Boys are half as likely to commit a crime which requires incarceration by the time they are 30

## *The Healthy Marriage Initiative (HMI)*

### **The Healthy Marriage Initiative is NOT:**

- A trap for anyone in an abusive or violent relationship
- A way to force anyone to either get married or stay married
- A Federal or local dating service
- A withdrawal or lessening of support for single parents
- The anti-poverty program—**work is**

### **The Healthy Marriage Initiative IS:**

For couples who choose marriage for themselves to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to form and sustain a healthy marriage. It is a strategy for achieving child well-being, recognizing that children do best when raised by both parents in a committed, healthy marriage.

## *Why the focus on African Americans?*

The African American Healthy Marriage Initiative (AAHMI) is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Healthy Marriage Initiative.

The roundtable concluded that any discussion about the state of marriage among African Americans must be considered within the context of their historical legacy in this country.

The AAHMI promoted a culturally competent strategy which fosters healthy marriages, improves child well-being and strengthens families within the African American community.

Studies show that while 35% of Americans between age 24 and 34 have never been married, that percentage increases to 54% for African Americans in the same age group. Additionally, married couples head 76% of our American families, while African American married couples head only 47.9% of American families.

**While the overall rate for single parent households in America has increased for all children, it is especially alarming among African Americans. Between 1960 and 1995, the number of African American children living with two married parents dropped from 75% to 33%. At this moment, 69% of African American births are to single mothers, as compared to 33% nationally.**

## Culturally Competent Strategies

Culture, race, age, ethnicity, gender, education, religion and socioeconomic status can all influence individual and community responses to marriage issues. Cultural orientation, traditions and practices form a diversity of beliefs, attitudes, and inter-personal styles and behaviors. Differences in age, race, ethnicity, gender, education and religious background, and socioeconomic status can influence how people and organizations view and respond to marriage activities.

## Goals of the African American Healthy Marriage Initiative (AAHMI)

- Responsible fatherhood
- Healthy marriages
- Improved child well-being
- Stronger African American families
- Stronger African American communities

## African American Healthy Marriage Initiative Strategies include:

- I. **Educate and communicate with the African American community on the AAHMI through the use of:** *focus groups, high profile endorsements, dissemination of information, outreach and marketing.*
- II. **Establish and strengthen ACF partnerships to stabilize families and communities by working with** African American media, business, youth, faith-based and community organizations, historically black colleges and universities, women's civic, government and public organizations.
- III. **Identification of and access to** resources which support the building of capacity within the African American community to provide healthy marriage programs and services.

### How will the AAHMI be Implemented?

The Assistant Secretary of ACF has designated co-leads for the AAHMI. A steering committee for the AAHMI has been formed that includes representation from various ACF program offices. The AAHMI will reach out to external partners and stakeholders and identify broad-based national and local coalitions in the successful development and implementation of this very important strategy.

## Benefits of Healthy Marriage include:

- More wealth on average than singles or cohabitating couples
- Children in two-parent, married households enjoy better physical health than those children in other non-married households
- The reduction of risk to adults and children being victimized or perpetuating violent crime

### **For additional information:**

Visit our website at [www.acf.hhs.gov](http://www.acf.hhs.gov), or contact your ACF regional office to learn more about this important initiative

Region I – 617-565-1020

CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT

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